

Vets score highly in customer satisfaction survey

Clients are overwhelmingly satisfied with their local vet according to a recent customer satisfaction survey organised by the New Zealand Veterinary Association.

The national survey asked clients of participating practices a wide range of questions relating to the quality of services provided by vets. Individual practices randomly distributed survey forms to clients asking questions on the performance of vets and staff, as well as the standards of facilities and range of services the profession offers to the public. Five hundred and twenty-eight people responded from both the farm and companion animal sectors.

Commenting on the survey results Murray Gibb, chief executive of the NZVA said, "The poll shows veterinary practices rate consistently higher than similar businesses surveyed by the same market research company. Furthermore, there has been continued improvement in nearly all areas surveyed such as quality of facilities,

responsiveness to requests for assistance, staff competence and value for money compared with similar surveys from 1996 and 1998.

"The results found that the average overall satisfaction rating for vets was 95.6 percent. Other survey results show that similar businesses rarely reach 85 percent in this area," said Mr Gibb.

"Vets use customer satisfaction surveys to gain feedback on their performance compared with other veterinary practices. Benchmarking enables our members to highlight areas where their clients indicate there is room for improvement. Further surveys are then conducted to ensure that changes to policies and service levels are in fact meeting client needs.

"In addition vets can use this tool to gain feedback from clients they perceive to be unsatisfied with the practice's service. The ratings and comments received generally identify the areas requiring attention," he reported.

Anti tail docking law passed in Australia

Australia's first law banning tail docking of dogs took effect in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) on 1 January. The decision had the unanimous support of all MPs in the legislature and followed an intensive lobbying campaign by the Australian Veterinary Association against cosmetic docking.

"The fact that all MPs supported the measures is highly significant," said NZVA animal welfare spokesperson, Virginia Williams. "It has been previously perceived in the political arena that a ban on cosmetic docking is unachievable because of the size of the pro docking lobby. The Australian vets undertook their campaign to show that this lobby group was tiny and completely out of step with public sentiment. The ACT Parliament recognised this, hence the unanimous support for the measure.

"The belief that a ban can only be

achieved at some political cost has been laid to rest. It is likely that other states will follow ACT's example," said Dr Williams.

The measure was included in an overhaul of animal control legislation which included:

- Compulsory desexing of all cats and dogs unless specifically exempted
- Heavy penalties for dog owners who fail to clean up after their dogs in public places
- Compulsory microchipping of cats and dogs before sale

"Moves in New Zealand to outlaw cosmetic tail docking of dogs were dropped when the New Zealand Parliament passed the current Animal Welfare Act," said Dr Williams. "The NZVA is opposed to the practice, and only backed off its lobby to ensure that this legislation was passed in 1999. The Australian move will bring the issue to the fore once more in this country."

NZVA supports Dog Control Act

The NZVA supports the Dog Control Act as it currently stands, remarked Dr Chris Hutchings, the Association's spokesperson on urban animal management.

The Act recently came under attack after Wellington dog Toot was ordered to be destroyed after killing a cat. Toot then disappeared before the order could be enforced.

Responding to the criticism Dr Hutchings said, "Calls to change the Act because of the inability to enforce the destruction order issued under Section 57 in this case are not justified. The Act is tough and robust and since it was passed in 1996 the number of dog attacks has dropped significantly.

"All dogs are potentially dangerous to people, stock and wildlife. The Act has given the judiciary and enforcement agencies a tool to effectively deal with dog attacks."

Wellington lawyer and ACT list MP Stephen Franks criticised the Act for being too rigid, particularly S57(5) which states (in relation to dog attacks), "...the Court shall, on convicting the owner, make an order for the destruction of the dog unless the circumstances of the attack were exceptional and do not justify the destruction of the dog."

Section 58 of the Act places exactly the same constraints on the Courts in relation to dealing with dogs causing the death of protected wildlife.

"Take the recent case of the two dogs shot by a dog control officer in Oamaru for killing a number of rare and protected penguins. Imagine if the dogs were not shot immediately and were subjected to a destruction order under S58. If the dogs had disappeared like Toot before the order was enforced, the public outcry against the dogs and the owner would have been huge," said Dr Hutchings.

The Waitaki District Council will prosecute the owner of the dogs under the Dog Control Act.

Animal welfare on the “Lord Of The Rings” Project



Dr Virginia Williams

Veterinarians were closely involved in the “Lord of The Rings” project, ensuring that the health and welfare of animals used in the filming were maintained to a high standard, reported NZVA animal welfare spokesperson Dr Virginia Williams.

Referring to claims that horses were maltreated during filming, Dr Williams

detailed the steps taken to ensure that the animals were well cared for throughout the project.

“The film company employed a veterinarian full time to be available on site throughout production. During concurrent filming at the project’s multiple sites other vets were in attendance and provided cover at all times. In addition, local veterinarians were engaged to provide advice and medical and surgical support during the selection, training and agistment of horses for the film. At times there were two veterinarians on location full time - one to look after the company horses and the other to watch over the up to 250 extras’ horses.

“Given the size of the project it was remarkably accident free. However inevitably when large numbers of horses are involved in events such as this some accidents and injuries do occur. Particularly high standards of health and welfare were maintained in treating ill and injured horses throughout the project,” Dr

Williams said.

To provide additional assurances on animal welfare practices the Animal Welfare Institute of New Zealand had independent observers monitoring the project throughout filming. They reported no concerns.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries investigated three complaints about the treatment of horses in the film. All were dismissed.

The American Humane Association, a Los Angeles body which monitors film projects to ensure acceptable standards are maintained when animals are used, requested a report on alleged mistreatment of horses in the filming. The report completely cleared the film company, Three Foot Six Ltd Productions of any wrongdoing.

“Three Foot Six Ltd Productions is to be congratulated on the pro active and detailed way it dealt with animal health and welfare matters from the beginning to the end of the project,” Dr Williams said.

Animals In Schools Education Trust (Aiset)

Set up as a charitable trust in 1993 the Animals In Schools Education Trust (Aiset) provides resource material for teachers to help include animal subjects in the school curricula at both primary and secondary levels. Aiset seeks to ensure that school pupils are concerned for the welfare of animals of all species, as well as obtain a balanced view of peoples’ relationships with animals.

Aiset was originally sponsored by a wide grouping of representative organisations including the NZVA, Federated Farmers, the Ministry of Agriculture, the New Zealand Kennel Club, the Royal Society of New Zealand, the RNZSPCA, the Wellington Zoological Gardens and the New Zealand Cat Fancy. The initiative in setting up the trust was provided by the NZVA, through its then president Dr Catherine Smith.

It endorses educational animal welfare resource material that it considers is balanced and informative.

Last year the Trust endorsed a resource kit entitled “Brandy the Budgerigar,” which included a video, work book, teacher’s notes and other information designed to increase the awareness of students about the care and welfare of birds.

The Trust has several initiatives under way for 2001, including a childrens’ art exhibition with an animal welfare theme. A pilot for this initiative is being sponsored by the Mahara Art Gallery at Waikanae with the involvement of local veterinarians.

Veterinarian receives Royal Society Award

Former president of the NZVA, Dr Catherine Smith has been awarded a New Zealand Science and Technology Medal for her services to animal welfare and education.

Current president Dr Jenny Weston congratulates Dr Smith on the award and believes the recognition is richly deserved.

“Catherine Smith has made an outstanding contribution to education and animal welfare for many years. As an NZVA Board member she lobbied long and hard over animal welfare initiatives, contributing significantly to the eventual passage of the Animal Welfare Act in 1999,” Dr Weston said.

Dr Smith was the driving force behind the formation of the Animals In Schools Education Trust in 1993 and continues as its founding chair. In addition she has made an enormous contribution to veterinary nursing education in New Zealand, overseeing the incorporation of the animal care and handling standards into the NZQA framework. She continues to chair the Animal Nursing and Technology Board, the Standards Implementation Body covering these standards.

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